Appl. No. 09/580,448
Amdt. dated October 9, 2007
Reply to Office Action of May 7, 2007

PATENT

Amendments to the Claims:

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings of claims in the application:

Listing of Claims:

1.   (Currently Amended) A method for assisting a customer in choosing a combination of commodities ~~commodity options~~, wherein the commodities are organized into N categories, wherein said combination is composed of one commodity selected from each category ~~has at least two commodity categories~~, and each commodity category has at least two commodity options, and wherein N is an integer greater than one, the method comprising ~~the steps of~~:

        (a) ranking the options within each commodity category based, in part, on at least one optimization parameter ~~parameters, the optimization parameters including information not provided by the customer~~;

        (b) ~~for each commodity category,~~ creating at least N ~~a plurality of~~ combinations of commodity options by, for each of the N commodity categories:

                (i) selecting a highest ranked option for ~~a~~ that commodity category;

                (ii) automatically selecting any options in other commodity categories that are linked to the option selected in step(b)(i);

                (iii) selecting valid options for remaining commodity categories, until the combination of commodity options is complete;

        (c) calculating a total effective cost of each combination of commodity options; and

        (d) presenting the at least N combinations of commodity options to the customer, whereby the customer selects a combination of commodity options for purchase.

2.   (Original) The method of claim 1, further comprising the steps of: visiting a web site by the customer; and

        sending the preferences of the customer to the web site.

3.   (Original) The method of claim 1, wherein step (b) comprises the additional steps of:

(iv) selecting a next ranked option for a commodity category;

(v) selecting any options in other commodity categories that are linked to the option selected in step (b)(iv); and

(vi) selecting valid options for remaining commodity categories until the combination of commodity options is complete.

4.   (Original) The method of claim 3, wherein steps (b)(iv), (b)(v) and (b)(vi) are repeated for a plurality of ranks.

5.   (Original) The method of claim 1, wherein step (d) comprises presenting the combinations of commodity options ranked by total effective cost.

6.   (Original) The method of claim 1, wherein step (a) comprises ranking the options within each category by effective cost.

7.   (Original) The method of claim 1, wherein step (a) comprises calculating an effective cost for each option and ranking the options within each category by effective cost.

8.   (Original) The method of claim 7, wherein the effective cost calculations include bundling discounts.

9.   (Original) The method of claim 7, wherein step (c) comprises calculating a total effective costs for each of the plurality of combinations of commodity options by adding the effective costs of the selected options in the combinations of commodity options.

10.   (Previously Presented) The method of claim 7, wherein step (a) comprises the steps of, for each category:

(i) identifying at least one first parameter associated with a commodity option;

(ii) associating at least one value to the at least one first parameters;

(iii) calculating an estimated cost of the commodity option based on features of the commodity category that are desired by the customer;

(iv) obtaining from the customer a preference weighting on at least one second parameter;

(v) calculating an effective cost of the commodity option by adjusting the estimated cost based on the preference weighting and the at least one value assigned to the parameters; and

(vi) ranking the options within each category by effective cost.

11.   (Original) The method of claim 10, wherein the parameter is a feature, an attribute, or a performance characteristic associated with the commodity category.

12.   (Original) The method of claim 10, wherein step (a)(ii) includes the steps of:

setting a range for the at least one first parameter;

sampling a random set of customers over the range; and

determining a best fit utility function using regression analysis on data received as a result of sampling.

13.   (Previously Presented) The method of claim 12, wherein the utility function is stored in a first database, information about the commodity including bundling links is stored in a second database, and information about the customer is stored in a third database.

14.   (Original) The method of claim 13, wherein the combinations created in step (b) are saved in the second database.

15.   (Original) The method of claim 12, wherein the utility function is evaluated to obtain the at least one value, wherein the value represents a cost or benefit of the parameter to the customer.

16.   (Original) The method of claim 15, wherein the value is subtracted from the estimated cost if it represents a benefit to the customer or the value is added to the estimated cost if it represents a cost to the customer.

17.   (Canceled).

18.   (Original) The method of claim 1, wherein the commodity categories that are included in the combination are predefined.

19.   (Original) The method of claim 1, wherein the commodity categories are services.

20.   (Original) The method of claim 19, wherein the services include telephone service plans.

21.   (Original) The method of claim 1, wherein the commodity are products and services.

22.   (Original) The method of claim 21, wherein the commodity categories include wireless telephone services plans and handsets.

23 - 24.   (Canceled).

25.   (Original) The method of claim 1, wherein step (d) comprises presenting the combinations of commodity options to the customer, whereby the customer selects a portion of a combination of commodity options for purchase.

26.   (Currently Amended) A system for assisting a customer in choosing a combination of commodities ~~commodity options~~, wherein the commodities are organized into N categories, wherein said combination is composed of one commodity selected from each category ~~has at least two commodity categories~~, and each commodity category has at least two commodity options, and wherein N is an integer greater than one, the system comprising:

ranking the options within each commodity category based, in part, on at least one optimization parameter ~~parameters, the optimization parameters including information not provided by the customer~~;

means for creating at least N ~~a plurality of~~ combinations of commodity options for each of the N commodity ~~category~~ categories, comprising:

means for selecting a highest ranked option for a particular commodity category;

means for automatically selecting any options in other commodity categories that are linked to the selected highest ranked option;

means for selecting valid options for remaining commodity categories, until the combination of commodity options is complete;

means for presenting the at least N combinations of commodity options to the customer, whereby the customer selects a combination of commodity options for purchase.

27.   (Original) The system of claim 26, additionally comprising:

means for visiting a web site by the customer; and

means for sending the preferences of the customer to the web site.

28.   (Original) The system of claim 26, wherein the means for creating a plurality of commodity combinations additionally comprises:

means for selecting a next ranked option for a commodity category;

means for selecting any options in other commodity categories that are linked to the option selected by the means for selecting a next ranked option; and

means for selecting valid options for remaining commodity categories until the combination of commodity options is complete.

29.   (Original) The system of claim 26, wherein the means for presenting the combinations comprises means for presenting the combinations of commodity options ranked by total effective cost.

30.   (Original) The system of claim 26, wherein the means for ranking the options comprises means for ranking the options within each category by effective cost.

31.   (Original) The system of claim 26, wherein the means for ranking the options comprises means for calculating an effective cost for each option and ranking the options within each category by effective cost.

32.   (Original) The system of claim 31, wherein the effective cost calculations include bundling discounts.

33.   (Original) The system of claim 31, wherein the means for calculating a total effective costs comprises means for calculating a total effective cost for each of the plurality of combinations of commodity options by adding the effective costs of the selected options in the combinations of commodity options.

34.   (Previously Presented) The system of claim 31, wherein the means for ranking the options comprises, for each category:

means for identifying at least one first parameter associated with a commodity option;

means for associating at least one value to the at least one first parameter;

means for calculating an estimated cost of the commodity option based on features of the commodity category that are desired by the customer;

means for obtaining from the customer a preference weighting on at least one second parameter;

means for calculating an effective cost of the commodity option by adjusting the estimated cost based on the preference weighting and the at least one value assigned to the parameters; and

means for ranking the options within each category by effective cost.

35.   (Original) The system of claim 34, wherein the parameter is a feature, an attribute, or a performance characteristic associated with the commodity category.

36.   (Original) The system of claim 34, wherein the means for associating at least one value includes:

means for setting a range for the at least one first parameter;

means for sampling a random set of customers over the range; and

means for determining a best fit utility function using regression analysis on data received as a result of sampling.

37.   (Previously Presented) The system of claim 36, additionally comprising:

means for storing the utility function in a first database;

means for storing information about the commodity including bundling links in a second database; and

means for sorting information about the customer in a third database.

38.   (Original) The system of claim 37, additionally comprising means for saving the combinations in the second database.

39.   (Original) The system of claim 36, additionally comprising means for evaluating the utility function to obtain the at least one value, wherein the value represents a cost or benefit of the parameter to the customer.

40.   (Original) The system of claim 39, wherein the value is subtracted from the estimated cost if it represents a benefit to the customer or the value is added to the estimated cost if it represents a cost to the customer.

41.   (Canceled).

42.   (Original) The system of claim 26, additionally comprising means for predefining the commodity categories that are included in the combination.

43 - 44. (Canceled).

45.   (Original) The system of claim 26, wherein the means for presenting the combinations of commodity options additionally comprises means for the customer to select a portion of a combination of commodity options for purchase.

46 - 67. (Canceled).

68.   (Previously Presented) The method of claim 1, wherein the optimization parameter comprises a utility function.

69.   (Canceled).

70.   (Previously Presented) The method of claim 68, wherein the utility function is determined at least in part based on a regression analysis.

71.   (Previously Presented) The method of claim 68, wherein the utility function represents at least one of a cost or a benefit.

72.   (Previously Presented) The system of claim 26, wherein the optimization parameter comprises a utility function.

73.   (Canceled).

74.   (Previously Presented) The system of claim 72, wherein the utility function is determined at least in part based on a regression analysis.

75.   (Previously Presented) The system of claim 72, wherein the utility function represents at least one of a cost or a benefit.

76.   (Previously Presented) The method of claim 70, wherein the regression analysis employs at least one constant to determine the utility function.

77.   (Previously Presented) The system of claim 74, wherein the regression analysis employs at least one constant to determine the utility function.